The Role of Man's Best Friend: Assessing the Cultural Liminality of the Canis Lupus Familiars and Its Influence on Human Societies

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THE ROLE OF MAN'S BEST FRIEND: ASSESSING THE CULTURAL
LIMINALITY OF THE CANIS LUPUS FAMILIARS AND
ITS INFLUENCE ON HUMAN SOCIETIES

by

Julianne L. D’Amico

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ABSTRACT

The Role of Man’s Best Friend: Assessing the Cultural Liminality of the Canis Lupus Familiars And its Influence on Human Societies

by

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Utah State University, 2016

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This project combines history and folklore to illuminate the concept of liminality and the human-dog relationship as it has evolved since the species domestication. The lore highlights the permanent liminality of the dog, the use of the species as remedies in Folk Medicine, and the dog’s shift from secondary participant to active agent in contemporary medical fields. The informant data and the context of the lore provide the basis for a historical analysis on how the human-dog relationship has evolved, from the past to the present, and inform how this relationship will progress into the future. Furthermore, the lore supports the argument that the cultural liminality of the dog enabled the species to adopt the role of therapy animal and actively initiate and continue to engage in the healing process.

(58 Pages)
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INTRODUCTION

Dissenting voices were raised in celebration of basic dogs, just as they were, in support of the poor, of workers, slaves, women, children, and ultimately Nature. In effect, the dog came to embody the conflict between city and country, rich and poor, white and black, civilization and the wild, to assume ambiguous position as an intermediary between worlds.¹

***

*Canis lupus familiaris* (modern domesticated dogs) are the product of human society and it is through understanding their history that we come to understand our own. Yet several aspects of the species’ history, such as their ability to adopt and thrive in new roles within human society, continues to elude scientists and scholars. I will combine history and folklore to illuminate the concept of liminality and the human-dog relationship as it has evolved since the species domestication. The lore highlights the permanent liminality of the dog, the use of the species as remedies in Folk Medicine, and the dog’s shift from secondary participant to active agent in contemporary medical fields.² The context of the lore provide the basis for a historical analysis on how the human-dog relationship has evolved, from the past to the present, and inform how this relationship will progress into the future.³ Furthermore, the lore supports the argument that the cultural liminality of the dog enabled the species to adopt the role of therapy animal and actively initiate and continue to engage in the healing process.

To be liminal is to be “‘above and beyond’ the laws of nature” to be “trapped between the conceptual categories that are so integral to our perception of the natural

² After reading about the role of animals in early folk medicine, there seems to be a progression from the use of a deceased animal or its derived product, to create remedies, to the use of living animals that are actively engaged in the healing process. I will be using the term “secondary participant” to refer to the deceased animal and the term “active agent” to refer to the living animal.
³ The context provides the setting in which the lore is performed.
An individual (or liminal persona) becomes temporarily liminal when passing from one social category to another (for example from adolescence to marriage). The individual adopts a dualistic identity within the transitional phase (such as betrothal) and so the liminal being is “at once no longer classified and yet classified.” The dog is a culturally permanent liminal being positioned between the worlds of the animal kingdom and the human realm. The dualistic roles that the dog has adopted, since its domestication, places the species in this perpetually liminal state.

The species is associated with martyr-saints and other symbolic figures; yet dogs are perceived as neither fully divine nor fully earthly. As civilizations evolved the dog came to occupy the middle ground between nature and humanity and served as man’s connection to the wilderness in an urbanized society. Thus the dog is neither wild nor domesticated. Man’s best friend came to inhabit the realm between the living and the dead, their permanent liminality acting as a beacon to the temporary liminal souls transitioning from life to death. They are both harbingers of death, and guides for lost souls, they are guardians of the underworld, and spirits.

The species’ liminality is most prominent as a therapy dog in contemporary psychological therapy. The permanent liminality of the dog attracts temporary liminal personae caught in the transitional phases associated with an individual’s life stages such as emotional healing. This attraction between liminality enables marginal beings to

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transition from one phase to another with less complication. In therapy, this connection between liminal beings both initiates and remains active during the transitional rite.9

Existing scholarship which directly correlates the dog as a culturally liminal being is limited and does not engage the discussion from the historical or folklore lenses.10 Furthermore, the scholarship that does pertain to animals and liminality from these lenses does not include the dog.11 However, these studies do provide a foundation from which to build an interdisciplinary discussion on the cultural liminality of the dog from the historical and folklore lenses.

Equally lacking in the scholarship is a discussion on how the dog came to adopt the role of therapy animal. While studies highlight the role of animals in Folk Medicine, they rarely describe the use of the dog and its derived product to create remedies.12 The fields of Anthrozoology and Zootherapy, the contemporary equivalent of Folk Medicine, tend to discuss the role of the dog in furthering our understanding of human development.

8 Arnold van Gennep believed that the Rite of Transition severed as a cushion for the individual undergoing to Rites of Passage. For additional information see: Arnold van Gennep, The Rites of Passage (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).
10 Bueker discusses the cultural liminality of the dog from a sociological viewpoint and briefly eludes to this subject in her article. Catherine Simpson Bueker, “‘Leads’ to Expanded Social Networks, Increased Civic Engagement and Divisions Within a Community: The Role of Dogs,” Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare 40, no. 4 (December 2013): 211.
Additionally, these studies provide a discussion on choosing and training therapy dogs, developing pet-therapy programs, and finally the benefits of therapy dogs. However, there is no discussion on when the role of the dog shifted from secondary participant to active agent and how the species came to adopt its newest role. I argue that these missing pieces can be found in the folklore that highlights the use of the species, and its derived product, as remedies. Furthermore, I argue that the cultural liminality of the dog enabled the species to adopt this role and actively initiate and continue to engage in the healing process.

I will utilize two collections from Utah State University’s (USU) Special Collections and Archives to evaluate the cultural liminality of the dog in human societies and its role in the transitional rite of healing. Utah State University’s Student Folklore Genre Collection (Folk Coll. 8a), consists of folklore collected between the early 1960s to the present. It is divided into nine groups – customs, beliefs, speech, tales and jokes, songs, games and pranks, legends, material culture, and E-Lore – and was gathered primarily from residents of Utah. Groups Two (Beliefs) and Seven (Legends) contain the majority of lore pertaining to the cultural liminality of the dog. The Wayland D. Hand Collection of Superstition and Popular Belief (Folk Coll. 36) is an extensive collection of popular beliefs, from approximately 753 BC to the present, spanning from the United States and Europe.

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14 USU Student Folklore Genre Collection: Belief, 1960-2011. (FOLK COLL 8a), Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
15 USU Wayland D. Hand Collection of Superstition and Popular Belief. (FOLK COLL 36), Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
Section One describes the creation of the Rites of Passage, developed by Arnold van Gennep, and briefly outlines each of the three rites and the various life stages associated with that rite. The following segment will provide an in-depth exploration of the Rites of Transition, also called the marginal or liminal phase, and further defines the liminal persona (also known as the liminal being) and communitas. This section will conclude with a brief discussion on how scholars in the field of sociology have evaluated the cultural liminality of the dog and how folklorists have explored the cultural liminality of other animals.

Section Two will further analyze the USU Student Folklore Genre Collection and the Wayland D. Hand Collection of Superstition and Popular Belief. The remaining segment will explore the dog’s cultural liminality as portrayed in the primary and secondary sources. The dog has adopted numerous roles since its domestication such as: symbolic figures in religion, a dualistic connection between nature and culture, guides, guardians, harbingers, and spirits in death, as working animals, and as pets and companions.

The final section will provide a history of Folk Medicine, discuss the rites of transition within the field, and describe the use of animals since the founding of the field to the present. The following segment will explore the lore, housed in Folk Collections 8a and 36, which emphasizes the use of the dog and its derived product to create remedies. This segment will also highlight the progression of the dog’s role from secondary participant to active agent in the healing process as presented in the lore. This section will follow with a discussion on Anthrozoology and Zootherapy. Finally, this segment will
conclude with an exploration of how the dog’s cultural liminality and the species’ adoption of a new role have benefited human society.
SECTION ONE

LES RITES DE PASSAGE (THE RITES OF PASSAGE)

Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such; their ambiguous and indeterminate attribute are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions.\(^\text{16}\)

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Creation of the Rites of Passage

The schéma of rites de passage (rites of passage) emerged out of an analysis of ceremonies performed by pre-modern African and Oceanic societies which were associated with the succession of stages an individual encountered throughout life. Victor van Gennep, a French ethnographer and folklorist, conducted this analysis and published his findings in *Les Rites de Passage* in 1909.\(^\text{17}\) Van Gennep defined the rites of passage as “rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position, and age.”\(^\text{18}\) The performance of each rite and subsequent achievement of each stage – which includes birth, physiological puberty, social puberty, marriage, parenthood, occupational specializations, and death – was accomplished by every individual within society regardless of social ranking.\(^\text{19}\) However, the type of ceremony completed by the individual was indicative of their social ranking and this distinction was most prevalent in the society during which these rites were established.\(^\text{20}\) Van Gennep referred to this society as “modern,” implying the pattern of industrial society found in Western Europe.


\(^\text{17}\) Van Gennep was born in Ludwigsburg, Germany in 1873. Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 1.


\(^\text{19}\) Van Gennep discussed a clear distinction between physiological puberty and social puberty. He defined physiological puberty as the transitional phase from childhood to adolescence marked by the physical maturation of a woman’s body and her capability to bear children; while social puberty is defined as the transitional phase from adolescence to marriage or the age at which it become social acceptable for women to marry. For additional information see: van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 65-66.

\(^\text{20}\) Ibid, 1.
and the United States. The concept of the rites of passage has influenced what scholars consider when studying such ceremonies.

Arnold van Gennep observed that larger “pre-modern” societies, found in Africa and Oceania, contained different social groupings. As an individual shifted from a higher class to a lower class within the society, the classes became more distinct and independent from each other. Van Gennep notes that in “modern” societies, such as those found in Western Europe and the United States, these social distinctions (between higher and lower classes) essentially vanished with the exception of one: the distinction between the secular (profane), and the religious (sacred) worlds.

It is interesting to note that for one to pass from one status to another - for example from landed gentry to higher nobility - the individual must simply meet certain economic or intellectual requirements. An individual must however perform a ceremony in order to pass from one sacred group to another - for example from layman to priesthood. Furthermore, due to the profound distinction between the profane and sacred

21 Ibid, 1.
23 Van Gennep regarded those among the lowest level of social classes as semi-civilized and thus considered these groups to be less developed both socially and culturally. Van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, 2.
worlds, an individual must go through a liminal stage prior to passing from one to another. Van Gennep created the rites of passage based on these observations.\textsuperscript{25}

Life is composed of a series of stages: birth, physiological and social puberty, marriage, parenthood, and death. The transition from one stage to another is "implicit in the very fact of existence."\textsuperscript{26} Each succession is marked by a ceremony which enables the individual to pass from one defined position (such as adolescence) to another defined position (such as marriage). Van Gennep observed the occurrence of three phases, or rites, within each ceremony: séparation (separation), marge (transition), and agrégation (incorporation). While each rite may not be developed to the same extent within every ceremony, together these phases are known as the rites of passage.\textsuperscript{27}

The first phase of the ceremony, the rites of separation, represents the individual’s disconnection from a specific point either within the social structure, a set of cultural conditions, or from both. Separation rites are typically prominent in funeral ceremonies where the remaining two rites of passage are more applicable to those who have been left behind rather than to the deceased.\textsuperscript{28}

The second phase of the ceremony, the rites of transition, is also known as the marginal or liminal period in which the individual passes between stages. Transitional rites appear in pregnancy, betrothal, and initiation. Van Gennep notes that in ceremonies where the transitional period is more prominent, all three phases may be reduplicated within the transitional period. Betrothal is a strong example of both a transition rite, for the individual is neither an adolescent or married, and a reduplication of ceremonies. The

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, 1-2.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, 3.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, 1-15.
\textsuperscript{28} Turner, "Liminality and Communitas," 359.
passage from adolescence to betrothal is one complete ceremony of separation, transition, and incorporation while the passage from betrothal to marriage is a separate ceremony of transition and incorporation.\textsuperscript{29}

The final phase, the rites of incorporation, signifies the completion of the ceremony. At this point, the individual re-enters the social structure and has been given rights and obligations marking their new status. The individual is then expected to behave within the realm of their new position. These rights are prominent at the completion of marriage ceremonies where the individual has transitioned out of adolescence and into married life.\textsuperscript{30}

Van Gennep draws the analogy of passing through a door and equates this act to the rites of passage. When an individual approaches the threshold they are effectively separating themselves from the present room. The frame serves as a symbol of liminality in which the individual is transitioning from one room to the next. The individual completes the rites upon incorporating themselves into the adjacent room.

Alan Dundes argues that van Gennep’s three phase system anticipates structuralism by several decades and has influenced the way in which folklorists, as well as other scholars in the field of anthropology, evaluate the rituals associated with the different stages of life.\textsuperscript{31} Prior to van Gennep’s completion of the rites of passage, folklorists tended to focus on specific rituals, such as birth rituals, marriage rituals, and death rituals, as separate entities. Furthermore, it is important to note that van Gennep’s analysis was based on observations of ‘pre-modern’ societies which contained distinct

\textsuperscript{29} Further discussion on transition rites will be provided in the following section. Van Gennep, \textit{The Rites of Passage}, 11.

\textsuperscript{30} Turner, “Liminality and Communitas,” 359.

\textsuperscript{31} Dundes, “The Rites of Passage,” 101.
social groups. Finally, van Gennep argued that the distinction between the profane and
the sacred, which dictated the type of ceremony the individual must complete in order to
advance to the next stage, became more prominent in modern industrial societies. Van
Gennep states that although the distinction between the profane and the sacred has
especially vanished, the celebration of an individual’s transition from one stage to the
next is still prevalent in our current society.\footnote{32}

\textbf{Transition Rites: The Liminal Phase and Communitas}

Although the distinction between the profane and scared groups has lessened in
our current society, there are still rites of passage in which the marginal period is well-
developed such as being in the womb, puberty, initiation into a new age group (from
boyhood to manhood) or into an organization, health, and death. Additionally, the liminal
phase is commonly linked to symbols such as: invisibility, an eclipse of the sun and
moon, darkness, and the wilderness.\footnote{33} In this instance, the marginal period refers to both
the existence and absence of the symbol: to be present but not seen, such as in an eclipse.

The individual who enters the transitional phase becomes a transitional being, or
liminal personae, and adopts a dualistic identity. They are perceived as anti-structural for
they are essentially operating outside of the normal social structures of which the rites of
separation and the rites of incorporation enforce.\footnote{34} The transitional being becomes
inescapably ambiguous and structurally invisible for “they are at once no longer
classified and yet classified.”\footnote{35} Furthermore, the liminal personae may be thought of as

\footnote{33} Turner, “Liminality and Communitas,” 359.
\footnote{35} Turner, “Betwixt and Between,” 48.
unclean or polluting, to those living within the normal social structures, for they are
“betwixt and between’ all recognized fixed points” within the social structure.36

The transitional being may diverge away from the normal social structures to such
a degree that they are considered more susceptible to supernatural influences. It is in this
state that “liminality attracts liminality.”37 The individual, who is temporarily liminal
when engaged in the rites of transition, attracts superstitions, customs, and supernatural
creatures, the permanent residents of the liminal phase, by temporarily being similar. For
some, supernatural experiences are expected when entering the marginal period and the
appearance of the supernatural is considered to have a positive effect on the community
as a whole.38

The basic definition of communitas is shared liminality within a community. This
concept emphasizes the building of relationships based on interaction among individuals
in an unstructured way.39 Individuals are not subjected to roles and statuses, when in
communitas, for these identities are indicative of rites of separation and rites of
incorporation. Communitas produces its own structure in which free relationships are
converted into norm-governed relationships between social personae.40 This notion of
shared liminality is perhaps most prevalent following the death of a loved one in which
those who are left behind are collectively mourning the death of the individual. The

36 Turner highlights the work of Dr. Mary Douglas who emphasizes the concept that pollution “is a reaction
to protect cherished principles and categories from contradiction,” and argues that what is unclear and
contradictory is regarded as unclean; the unclean is the unclean. Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger: An
38 McCormick and White, Folklore, 791.
39 Frank Salamone, “Communitas, Rites of,” Routledge Encyclopedia of Religious Rites, Rituals, and
Festivals (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2004), 98.
40 McCormick and White, Folklore, 297.
community completes the rites of passage, as a collective, by separating themselves from the individual, mourning their loss, and incorporating themselves into a new stage in life.

Liminal Creatures

The scholarship on the dog is extensive and encompasses a multitude of fields including biology and genetics (selective breeding), and natural history. However, the discussion is lacking a direct correlation between the dog and liminality.\textsuperscript{41} Equally extensive is the scholarship on the rites of transition and the liminal period. Bueker discusses the liminality of the dog from the perspective as a sociologist but does not incorporate a historic or folklore lenses. McNeill examines cat lore and the species’ natural behavior to argue that it is a permanently liminal being. Both Bueker and McNeill provide a foundation from which to develop a discussion on the dog’s liminality from the fields of history and folklore.

Catherine Simpson Bueker discusses the unique role dogs play within American society and the subsequent impact on human relations and processes. Bueker states that dogs occupy “a liminal space of ‘almost human.’”\textsuperscript{42} She emphasizes that the species is considered closer to humans than several other animals and that the relationship between man and dog has progressed beyond the “binary ‘human-non-human’ paradigm.”\textsuperscript{43} Furthermore, she states that this perception of the dog, as almost human, is evident in her interviews with people describing their dogs as “more than gerbils,” “like children,” and “as part of the family.”\textsuperscript{44} Finally, Bueker argues that the dog’s required daily care and

\begin{footnotes}
\item [41] Bueker, “‘Leads’ to Expanded Social Networks,” 211-236.
\item [42] Ibid, 211.
\item [43] Ibid, 231.
\item [44] Ibid, 231.
\end{footnotes}
emotional attachment are distinguishing factors in bringing humans into contact with each other and negotiating human relationships.\textsuperscript{45}

Her argument stems from a study on the controversy over the uses of a mixed-used park in an upper-class, predominately white, suburb outside of a larger city in Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{46} The park encompassed several walking paths, a playground, a small basketball court, a baseball diamond, and a field used for both soccer and lacrosse games. The controversy pertained to a ban on dogs running off-leash throughout the park, which was passed in October 2008. The author observed public meetings discussing dog usage at the park, examined editorials and Letters to the Editor in a local newspaper, and analyzed 24 in-depth interviews. She identified a range of social relationships that the dog developed and influenced. Bueker argues that the dog enables the facilitation of conversation and the development of varied social networks because of its liminality.\textsuperscript{47}

Lynne McNeill discusses the cat’s natural behavior and uses folklore to highlight the species’ connection to the supernatural. McNeill begins the study by providing a brief natural history of the cat. The species most likely originated from the European wildcat (\textit{Felis silvestris silvestris}) and the African wildcat (\textit{Felis silvestris lybica}). She attributes travelers and traders as the initial agents who spread stories of the cat’s charm and utility to other cultures; thus leading to the spread of cat lore to multiple cultures around the world.\textsuperscript{48}

McNeill states that “folklore shows us that cats are considered supernatural creatures,” and provides examples of cat lore dating as far back as 1570 B.C.E. to the

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, 211.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, 215.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, 211.
present and ranging from Egypt to India, and from Scandinavia to the United States.\textsuperscript{49} She argues that the motifs and themes found in cat lore are similar to those in other supernatural folklore pertaining to creatures such as demons, ghosts, fairies, and monsters. Black cats are considered bad luck, throughout multiple cultures, and should never cross one’s path. To ward off or reverse bad luck, if a black cat should happen to cross your path, tip your hat and say “Good evening, Mr. Black Cat,” and then repeat this action when the cat is behind you.\textsuperscript{50} McNeill discusses how this display of respect can be found in lore pertaining to fairy folk and the devil. She highlights this connection between the cat and the supernatural, then questions why this connection is represented in the folklore when the species fits within the natural world.\textsuperscript{51}

McNeill states that cats are dualistic in nature. In terms of behavior the domestication process has had less of an impact on the cat than on other species and the cat still retains qualities similar to the African wildcat; thus the cat exhibits qualities associated with both domestication and the wild.\textsuperscript{52} Perhaps the cat has only been tamed and is in the midst of transitioning from wild to domestic. McNeill highlights other liminal behavioral traits including the species’ nocturnal instincts counteracting with society’s expectations to interact with the species during the day, its vigilance at night, and its laziness during the day.\textsuperscript{53} Cats are independent and aloof, but demand their owner’s attention when their food bowls are empty or require another necessity.\textsuperscript{54} The species cannot be categorized: they are neither domestic nor wild, nocturnal nor diurnal,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{49} Ibid, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Ibid, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Ibid, 7-8.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid, 11.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid, 12.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Ibid, 12.
\end{itemize}
vigilant nor lazy. McNeill argues that the cat’s natural behavior is liminal which connects the species to the supernatural through folklore. Their behavior is permanent, not temporary, because it is a part of their nature; therefore the cat is a perpetually liminal creature that is connected to the supernatural, another perpetually liminal category.

The dog is a permanent liminal being. It is because of its liminality that the dog is able to adopt and thrive in its new role as a therapy animal. Prior to discussing the cultural liminality of the dog, it is first necessary to develop an understanding of the creation of the Rites of Passage, a deeper interpretation of the Rite of Transition, and a general knowledge of how other scholars have discussed the dog’s liminality within their own fields and the liminality of other animals. Section One provided this information. Section Two will briefly analyze the USU Student Folklore Genre Collection and the Wayland D. Hand Collection of Superstition and Popular Belief. Following this analysis, this segment will explore the dog’s cultural liminality as depicted in the primary and secondary sources.

55 Ibid, 11-12.
56 Ibid, 14.
SECTION TWO

BETWIXT AND BETWEEN: THE PERMANENT LIMINAL BEING

In symbolic terms, the domestic dog exists precariously in the no-man’s land between the human and the non-human worlds. It is an interstitial creature, neither person nor beast, forever oscillating uncomfortably between the roles of high status animal and low-status person.57

Analysis of Collections

In order to evaluate the cultural liminality of the dog through historical and folklore lenses, I used two collections housed at Utah State University: the USU Student Folklore Genre Collection (Folk Coll. 8a) and the Wayland D. Hand Collection of Superstition and Popular Belief (Folk Coll. 36). Students studying folklore at Utah State University and Brigham Young University collected the lore for Folk Coll. 8a. While Wayland D. Hand, a professor at the University of California in Los Angeles, collected the lore for Folk Coll. 36 with some assistance from his pupils.

The lore from Folk Collection 8a dates between the early 1960’s and the present. Utah residents were the primary informants. This collection provides examples of the beliefs within a specific time period and smaller study area. Residents living within the United States and Europe provided lore for Folk Collection 36. This collection provides an idea of the various beliefs within a broader area. The lore in this collection dates as far back as Ancient Rome and extends to the present. Each of these collections contains supplementary and primary evidence of the cultural liminality of the dog originating from within Utah and expanding into the greater US region and Europe.

Figure 2-1 is an example of the type of information included in Folk Coll. 8a, which encompasses informant data, context, text, and texture. Informant Data typically provides the informant’s name, age, address, and occupation. The context addresses the setting in which the informant provides the lore, while the texture encompasses the “feel” of the text and how it was presented. Figure 2-2 is an example of Folk Coll. 36 which primarily provides the text. Although Folk Coll. 36 does not include as much data as Folk Coll. 8a, it is still possible to glean information from the text alone. A folklorist would see two symbols of liminality (the eclipse of the sun and moon and darkness), as well as a liminal being (werewolf), and use this as evidence to show that liminality attracts liminality. A historian may detect an attempt to explain strange phenomena which occur only during an eclipse. They may attempt to correlate lore with an actual historic event or incorporate it into a larger discussion pertaining to social history.

Betwixt and Between: The Permanent Liminal Being

Folklore indicates that dogs are permanently liminal beings.\(^{58}\) Whereas the cat’s liminality is expressed through its behavior, the dog’s liminality may be accessed through the multiple roles that the species has played in human societies. These roles include: martyr-saints and other symbolic figures in religion, their dualistic connection between nature and culture, their portrayal in death, and their progression from working animals to

Figure 2-1: Example of lore where the informant data, context, and texture is provided in addition to the text.

Informant: Tina Lee M. Nusbaum  
Age:  
Address: Provo, Utah

Item: Concerning Howling Dogs and Death  
Informant Data: Tina Lee was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1957. She is attending BYU as a freshman majoring in medicine. She is interested in all sports especially swimming and water skiing. She is of German and Swedish ancestry.  
Context: She told me this superstition as she remembered it from her mother.  
Text: Everytime a dog howls and you hear him someone in your family will die. It actually happened to her when she was home. They heard a dog howl one night and two days later her uncle died of a heart attack. Another time it occurred her mother heard a howl and her grandmother died.  
Texture: It's not an ordinary howl it's a strange tone in the dog's voice that tell if someone is going to die.

Collector: Sheri Capell  
Date: Fall 1975, Brigham Young University  
City: Provo, Utah

USU Student Folklore Genre Collection: Belief, 1960-2011. (FOLK COLL 8a: Group 2, Box 10, Folder 1), Special Collections and Archives Department, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.

Figure 2-2: Example with little information provided. This belief possibly originated from Russia or the informant was from Russia.

Eclipses of the sun and moon were signs of the werewolf as the latter were thought to eat them because they loved darkness.

USU Wayland D. Hand Collection of Superstition and Popular Belief. (FOLK COLL 36: Cabinet 10: 10-6: 2: Werewolf), Special Collections and Archives Department, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
companions. Liminality attracts liminality; each of these roles presents an anti-structural or supernatural component which further enhances the dog’s liminal identity.  

The story of Guinefort, a martyr-saint of southern France, tells of his heroic martyrdom and of the healings that occurred at his shrine after his unjust death. Guinefort’s owner left his trusted dog alone with his young child. The father returned home to find blood surrounding the infant’s crib, and plastering the walls, with Guinefort sitting next to the crib and blood covering his mouth. Assuming that Guinefort attacked the infant the father promptly took an arrow and shot the dog through the heart. He soon discovered the infant safe in his crib and the body of a dead snake, which had been trying to harm the baby, below it. Guinefort had loyally defended the infant and saved its life.

The French honored Guinefort as a martyr and his body was enshrined in southern France. His permanent liminality is prominent in his designation as both a heretic and a saint. The designation of sainthood has usually been reserved for humans. Guinefort’s designation as a saint also signified him as a heretic, and thus a liminal being, because this designation placed him outside the realm of normal customs and beliefs. Until the nineteenth century, women would bring their sick or unwanted children to Saint Guinefort’s shrine, and so in death he became the healer and guardian of dying and abandoned children with no identity. Etienne (Stephen) de Bourbon, a writer and preacher, later disinterred and burnt Guinefort’s body. De Bourbon decided that while the dog could be designated as an official heretic, he could not be designated as an official

61 The snake may be replaced with a badger or puma.
The original designation of sainthood and his role as healer and protector of children, within liminal states, placed Guinefort in a permanent state of betwixt and between.

As humanity’s perceptions of nature have changed, the dog’s role has shifted to meet societal demands. Prior to the advent of agriculture, herding, and settlement, the hunters and gatherers of nomadic tribes viewed everything natural as habitat and so thought of both themselves and animals as members of nature (as seen in Figure 2-3). Following the growth of urban-industrial societies humanity began to draw strict lines between controlled (domesticated) and uncontrolled (wild) plants, animals, and spaces (as seen in Figure 2-4). Our notion of where our own species fit in with the greater context of nature shifted as well. Scholars, such as Carolyn Merchant and Deborah Bird Rose, argue that humanity came to identify them as distinct, and better, than the rest of nature.

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67 Merchant highlights this concept, referred to as the “civilizing” process, in her discussion on European elites in the 16th century. As lines were drawn between “animality and humanity, wilderness and civilizations, disorder and order” the European elites advocated for the suppression of “beastlike qualities in humans” represented in their medieval ancestors and the “savages” of the New World. Merchant, Ecological Revolution, 40 – 41. Bird argues that dualism separates humanity from nature. Additionally, she argues that humanity’s ability to think places mankind on a superior plane to nature: “Only humans think, and human thought is not part of nature but rather that which separates humans from nature.” Deborah Rose Bird, Wild Dog Dreaming: Love and Extinction, eds. Michael P. Branch, SueEllen Campbell, and John Tallmadge (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).
Figure 2-3: Nature and culture as joint classifications. Both humans and dog are members of nature.


Figure 2-4: Nature and culture are two distinct classifications. Humans are classified as culture. Dogs occupy the liminal space between nature and culture.

Historian Roderick Nash states that similar thoughts of superiority soon transgressed onto domesticated animals following the rise of agriculture, herding, and European settlement within the United States.\textsuperscript{68} Consequently, domestic dogs were "superior to wolves" but not on the same plane as humans.\textsuperscript{69} This concept also applies to other domestic plants and animals. It was at this point in which dogs, as well as other domesticated animals, came to occupy the liminal space between nature and culture. While humanity could no longer classify the dog as a part of nature, due to its status as a domestic, we could not perceive the dog as equal to humanity either. Thus the dog occupied the middle ground between nature and humanity.\textsuperscript{70}

The idea of a dog's liminality became more pronounced following the expansion of urbanization. Humanity's connection to nature became further jeopardized as more of the population began to inhabit urban and suburban areas. Urban residents soon sought the peace and solitude that could only be found within nature; however, only a few of those residents could afford such access.\textsuperscript{71} The dog came to represent the wild within the urban and suburban settings by serving as man's connection to nature.\textsuperscript{72} This representation placed the dog in yet another liminal state between the urban environment and the wilderness.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{68} Nash, \textit{Wilderness and The American Mind}, xi.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid, xi.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid, xii.
\textsuperscript{71} Derr, \textit{A Dog's History of America}, 168 – 174.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, 168 – 174.
Lore pertaining to the dog’s liminal role in death is extensive. The USU Student Folklore Genre Collection (Folk Collection 8a) includes over forty entries in Group 2 (Beliefs) and over thirty entries in Group 7 (Legends); the Wayland D. Hand Collection of Superstition and Popular Belief (Folk Collection 36) contains over one hundred entries (examples are provided in Table 2-1).

The legend of Saint Anne’s Retreat, in Logan Canyon, Utah, highlights the dog as a permanent liminal being in the form of a spirit. There are several variations of this legend; however, the most popular tells of a nun, occasionally named Heckada (Hekida or Hecate), who was raped by a priest, became pregnant, and gave birth while staying at St. Anne’s Retreat.\(^74\) Shortly after giving birth, the nun went mad (anti-structural or anti-social as discussed in Section One), drowned her baby in the swimming pool, and hung herself.\(^75\) To this day the nun haunts the retreat in the form of a dog, or else as herself, and controls a wild pack of dog spirits. The lore typically portrays these dogs as Doberman Pinschers, neither fully corporeal nor spectral, with glowing red or green eyes who attack visitors upon the command of Heckada. It is important to note that according to the story Heckada was in an anti-social state of mind prior to her death and so when she entered the rite of transition, from death to the next adventure, her spirit was prominently more liminal than others.

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\(^{74}\) The lore does not state why the nun is occasionally named Hecate.

\(^{75}\) It is interesting to note that the nun had just given birth and so had experienced an extremely liminal rite of transition. It is possible that because she had killed herself shortly after giving birth that she did not experience the rite of incorporation into her new role. This broken rite of passage immediately led into another rite of transition—death. Thus her spirit was predominantly liminal.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guardian/Protector</th>
<th>Of life</th>
<th>A white dog is supposed to be a protector. If it becomes larger as you approach it, do not go any further.</th>
<th>Maui, HI, USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Of Death</td>
<td>Dog guarded the body of a hung outlaw and later haunted the place.</td>
<td>Logan, UT, USA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harbinger General</td>
<td>If either a dog or cat enters the room of a sick person, the person will not recover. Rub bacon on the soles of a sick person’s feet, and then throw it out for the dog to eat. If the dog eats the bacon, the person will live, if the dog does not touch it, then it was a sign that the person will die.</td>
<td>Montpelier, ID, USA</td>
<td>Newton, UT, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howling</td>
<td>A howling dog means death. If a dog (or dogs) howls at night, someone is going to die.</td>
<td>Logan &amp; Midway, UT, USA</td>
<td>Alberta, Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession by Devil</td>
<td>Black dog</td>
<td>If one sees a black dog at midnight, he must not touch it. It is believed that the animal is possessed by the devil. Otherwise he will bring the devil into his house.</td>
<td>Smithfield, UT, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White dog</td>
<td>A woman once encountered a large white dog, which made no noise, and had the most horrible glowing eyes. Eventually, the dog disappeared.</td>
<td>Benjamin, UT, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirits Ability to see</td>
<td>Shoshone people believe that it is bad luck to kill a dog for they can see and hear everything, including spirits. Dogs can see the dead. If a dog whines and lays back its ear it means that a spirit is passing.</td>
<td>Fort Hall, ID, USA</td>
<td>KA, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As a</td>
<td>Two girls encountered a beautiful white German shepherd running along beside them on the bank of the road. The dog disappeared as it ran across the road.</td>
<td>Atlanta, GA, USA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) USU Student Folklore Genre Collection, 1960-2011. (FOLK COLL., 8a: Group 2, Boxes 1 and 6), Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
2) USU Student Folklore Genre Collection, 1960-2011. (FOLK COLL., 8a: Group 7, Boxes 3,7,8,10,11, and 22), Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
3) USU Wayland D. Hand Collection of Superstition and Popular Belief. (FOLK COLL., 36: Cabinet 3: 3-2: 1-2; Dog: Health), Special Collections and Archives Department, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
This dominance possibly enabled her spirit to attract, then take command of, a permanent liminal being and return to the realm of the living.\textsuperscript{76}

The dog’s portrayal as a harbinger of death spans multiple cultures and historic time periods. The most common belief states that the howl of a dog at night is a sign of death for the individual who hears the howling, a family member, or a resident in the neighborhood within three days. One of the earliest references to the dog’s howls as a symbol of death, originated in 1840 in Long Hanborough, West Oxfordshire, England.\textsuperscript{77} Similar lore can be found throughout the United States, including New York (1931), Ohio, and Texas (1956), and in Nova Scotia, Canada.

A common theme in the lore emphasizes the ability to see who will die, by looking through the eyes of a dog: “I knew a man, his dog was howling, and he went out to look between his ears to see what the dog was seeing, and he saw his own picture. And the man died in three days.”\textsuperscript{78} This particular lore originated from Illinois in 1935. The dog may also point its tail in the direction of the one who will soon die. Other common themes include: howling below a window (a symbol of liminality) and sometimes facing west, howling for three days and nights, the appearance of a spirit dog or headless dog, and a barking dog at midnight will cause a heart attack. A customary reversal, prevalent

\textsuperscript{76} The legend of St. Anne’s Retreat provides an example of a local legend portraying the dog as a spirit. Several variations of the legend may be found here: USU Student Folklore Genre Collection: Belief, 1960-2011. (FOLK COLL 8a: Group 7, Box 8, Folders 9 and 10), Special Collections and Archives Department, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.

\textsuperscript{77} The Wayland D. Hand collection rarely includes dates and so it is possible that other lore, included in the collection and that highlights the howling dog as a symbol of death, pre-dates 1840.

\textsuperscript{78} USU Wayland D. Hand Collection of Superstition and Popular Belief. (FOLK COLL 36: Cabinet 3: 3-2: 1: Dog: Death), Special Collections and Archives Department, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
in England, France, and Ireland, refers to turning either one or both shoes upside down during the night in order to ward off death.\(^7^9\)

It is interesting to note the role of the dog in determining whether a sick individual will survive or die. The most common belief states: if a dog enters the room of a sick individual, that person will not survive.\(^8^0\) This lore is popular throughout the United States, including Idaho, Kentucky, Nebraska, Ohio, and Utah, and can also be found in England and France. The use of food, particularly bread or meat, is a common occurrence associated with this lore.\(^8^1\) The species’ ability to sense death lends notion to its status as a permanent liminal being and the concept that liminality attracts liminality is prevalent in its role as a harbinger of death.

Analysis of the multiple roles that the dog has played throughout history further solidifies the perpetual liminality of the species. In the broadest context, there is a clear progression from a strictly utilitarian role to one of both utility and companionship. The distinction between working animal and companion became more pronounced following European colonization of the Americas and solidified in the late Eighteenth century.\(^8^2\)

There were seventeen unique Native American dog breeds prior to European’s arrival.\(^8^3\) Divided into three major groups based on size -(1) Large wolf-like, 2) Medium

\(^7^9\) Ibid, Cabinet 3: 3-2-1: Dog: Death.
\(^8^0\) USU Student Folklore Genre Collection: Belief, 1960-2011. (FOLK COLL 8a: Group 2, Boxes 10, 18, and 19), Special Collections and Archives Department, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah and USU Wayland D. Hand Collection of Superstition and Popular Belief. (FOLK COLL 36: Cabinet 3: 3-2: 1: Dog: Death), Special Collections and Archives Department, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
\(^8^1\) USU Student Folklore Genre Collection: Belief, 1960-2011. (FOLK COLL 8a: Group 2, Boxes 10, 18, and 19), Special Collections and Archives Department, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah and USU Wayland D. Hand Collection of Superstition and Popular Belief. (FOLK COLL 36: Cabinet 3: 3-2: 1: Dog: Death), Special Collections and Archives Department, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
\(^8^2\) Grier, *Pets in America*, 20.
with dropping tail and erect ears, and 3) Small — no larger than the average terrier)- each breed played specific utilitarian roles.\(^8^4\) Native Americans used their dogs to accomplish a variety of tasks, for example larger and medium sized breeds were used as beasts of burden, typically pulling the elderly and small children, house-hold goods and clothes, fire wood, and food.\(^8^5\) Tribes also used these dogs as watch dogs within the household and as guard dogs around the camp, and for hunting, corolling, and retrieving. Finally, Native Americans used fur from larger and medium sized breeds to produce clothing and in some tribes the consumption of dog meat provided a regular food source.\(^8^6\)

Smaller dogs served as companions for younger children, as household pets, as scavengers to rid the campsite of spoilable materials and bones, and as a source of heat or food.\(^8^7\) While Native Americans considered smaller breeds as pets, they often viewed these breeds as less valuable than larger and medium sized breeds which proved more beneficial.\(^8^8\)

It was not until European settlement that pets, as recognized by the standards of modern society, arrived in North America. The Europeans did use the dog for utilitarian purposes, most notably as wars dogs in early conquest and later as herding, hunting, and retrieving hounds.\(^8^9\) However, they also “disembarked with long traditions of

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\(^8^8\) The Spanish used dogs as tools of war in several of their conquests throughout North and South America. These dogs were trained to kill natives; Grier, *Pets in America*, 20; Schwartz, *A Dog’s History in the Early Americas*, 161-167. Between May and August 1862 Lieutenant George Armstrong Custer was accompanied by his dog during the Civil War’s Peninsula Campaign in Virginia. The 1st Marine Dog
relationships with other small animals,” and so either brought their pets on the journey to the New World or sought substitutes after their arrival.90

The concept of the “family dog,” became ingrained in American society during the expansion into the West. The dog was still seen and used as a working animal. However, the transition to companion animal is seen through the increase of personal family portraits taken with the beloved family dog.91 Additional evidence in the form of engraved brass dog collars, “lost dog” ads, and journals confirms that several American households considered dogs as pets by the end of the eighteenth century.92

The canine is in a perpetual state of liminality and has transitioned into multiple roles since its domestication. The dog’s newest role as a therapy animal extends the species’ liminality. It is because of its liminality that the dog is able to adapt to its newest role and become an active participant. Section Two presented an in-depth discussion on the dog’s liminality as depicted in its numerous roles that the species has played within human society. This section also highlights a progression in the human-dog relationship from one of strictly utilitarian to one of companionship. Section Three will provide an in-depth exploration of the dog’s role as a therapy animal. This section will briefly introduce the fields of Folk Medicine, Anthrozoology, and Zootherapy. Finally, this segment will discuss the dog’s initial role as a secondary participant in Folk Medicine, and then provide evidence from the lore to illuminate the species progression into an active agent in Anthrozoology and Zootherapy.

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Platoon was first deployed in World War Two. These dogs were used for running messages and scouting; Derr, A Dog’s History of America, 293-323.
90 Grier, Pets in America, 20.
92 Ibid, 21; Brian Fagan highlights a similar transition from working animal to a companion during the second half of the Eighteenth century in Europe. Fagan, The Intimate Bond, 222-224.
SECTION THREE
FROM FOLK REMEDIES TO PET THERAPY

Folk medicine reaches very far back in time. Nature opened the first drugstore. Primitive man and the animals depended on preventive use of its stock of plants and herbs to avoid disease and to maintain health and vigor. Because man and the animals were constantly on the move, Nature’s drugstore had branches everywhere.93

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Defining Folk Medicine and Exploring Its History

Folk medicine is defined as human knowledge pertaining to illnesses, medicine, and treatment throughout time.94 These folk medical beliefs are cultural rather than scientific, meaning that they “have a traditional existence alongside an official, politically dominant system of medicine.”95 The development of Folk Medicine stemmed from observing an animal’s natural healing instincts such as a sparrow seeking pine resin to apply to a sore foot or a deer chewing sage leaves and then licking a wound.96 The earliest written sources of Folk Medicine can be found on clay tablets from Mesopotamia (dating to approximately 2600 B.C.) and on papyri from Egypt (dating between 3,000 - 6,000 years ago).97 Contemporary folk healers believe in a holistic preventative approach and so those who practice this art emphasis the conditioning of the body as a whole so that disease will not attack it.98

96 Jarvis, Folk Medicine, 9-10.
97 Stokker, Remedies and Rituals, 6; Romulo Romeu Nobrega Alves, Maria Franco Trindade Medeiros, Ulysses Paulino Albuquerque, and Ierece Lucena Rosa, “From Past to Present: Medicinal Animals in a Historic Perspective,” in Animals in Traditional Folk Medicine: Implications for Conservation, eds. Romulo Alves and Ierece Lucena Rosa (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2013), 15-16.
98 Jarvis, Folk Medicine, 9.
The use of medicinal herbs, such as angelic, elderberry, gentian, juniper, onion, and plantain, can be traced as far back as 800-1000 AD. Medical researchers, during the eighteenth- and nineteenth - centuries, sought to synthesize these herbs in order to mass produce drugs. The 1600’s saw the introduction of minerals such as copper, gold, iron, lead, mercury, pewter, and silver. The popular “philosopher’s stone,” believed to heal any ailment, evolved out of this era. Folk healers learned to prescribe acidic drinks, such as grape juice, cranberry juice, or apple juice, and omit meals when sick in order to produce a new biochemical state to enhance recovery based on their observations of animals refusing to eat when sick.99

Folk Medicine serves to meet the needs of individuals who are not typically addressed by professional caregivers in regular medicine. Folk healers practiced both rational remedies and magical medicine. Although the folk healer’s rational remedies were similar to those prescribed by professional doctors, their magical medicine aimed to cure ailments inflicted by huldre-folk (hidden people) and witches.100 This notion of magical medicine led to the scientific community’s dismissal of Folk Medicine as nothing but a collection of medical old wives’ tales.101 Although scholarship on magical medicine and old wives’ tales have been broadly overlooked, a grain of truth lies within, such as the use of living animals to initiate healing, can be applied to modern medicine.102

The Rites of Transition in Folk Medicine

The transitional rite of passing through an object was especially prevalent in Folk Medicine and has lived on into the twentieth century. This act is practiced throughout Europe and America. The practice encompasses passing, or pulling, patients through holes in the earth, stones, or trees, or else moving the patient, or forcing them to crawl, creep, or walk, through a wide variety of natural or man-made apertures in order to cure the individual of the disease. There is an analogy between van Gennep’s door (referenced in Section One) and the aperture through which the patient is passed in that both the door and the aperture serve as symbols of transition or liminality. This rite of passage focuses on the individual’s divestment from the disease, accomplished by passing through a liminal object, and the securing of the individual’s health.  

In rare cases the liminal object (the natural or man-made aperture) can be replaced with an animal (a liminal being) during the curative ritual. For example, in Denmark, if a girl wishes to ensure an easy delivery for herself she must crawl naked through the chorion of a foal. In North Carolina, a father must pass his child under the belly, and over the back, of a donkey several times which is then followed by the child consuming the bread that has also been tasted by the animal. This act conditions the body in order to prevent disease from attacking it, and cures whopping cough. These curative rituals often involved the use of both contagious and imitative magic.

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104 A chorion is defined as: an embryo’s (of a bird, reptile, or mammal) outermost membrane, which attributes to the formation of the placenta in mammals.
106 The basic principle of contagious magic is the notion that there is a permanent relationship between an individual and their body. This relationship allows for the persons or things, once in contact, to influence each other afterward. Thus, by consuming part of an animal or its derived product, the consumer is able to
object with an animal the intended focus of the ritual shifts from the sole divestment of
the disease to the appropriation of the animal’s physical attributes, as well as its mental
and spiritual traits, in addition to curing the disease.

**Animals in Folk Medicine**

The earliest documented use of animals in Folk Medicine describes observing
various species’ natural healing instincts (in order to produce remedies using the same
substance the animal sought to heal); the use of animal derived products, such as their
organs; to produce medicines, and the consumption of specific animal parts to enhance
vitality. These records date to approximately 2600 B.C. and were discovered in
Mesopotamia. Developed mainly by the Assyrians and Babylonians, these documents
declare the use of bee’s wax and honey, fish oil, goat’s skins, gazelle sinew, mongoose
blood, turtle shell, and excrement or fat from birds, deer, and sheep as medicinal
remedies.

The *Natural History*, written by Pliny the Elder of Rome at the middle of the first
century A.D., is one of the most comprehensive texts pertaining to the *materia medica* of
the ancient world. Pliny’s eighteen volume series includes five books devoted to animal
substances and contains more material discussed in greater depth than any other previous
text. Whereas previous texts highlighted the use of other animal substances, such as ox
fat from Egypt, elephant tusks from Greece, or rhino horn from China, Pliny’s *Natural
History* is the first text in which scholars discuss the use of canine substances as folk

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109 Ibid, 18.
remedies.\textsuperscript{110} This suggests that lore pertaining to the role of the dog in Folk Medicine originated as early as the middle of the first century A.D.

Folk Collection 36 contains three documents from Pliny's *Natural History* which highlight the use of canine substances to cure various ailments. Pliny highlights the importance of dog's urine as a remedy for dislocations in Book 24: “A plant near which dogs make water, if uprooted without the touch of iron, is a very quick remedy for dislocations.”\textsuperscript{111} In Book 29, Pliny discusses the use of dog's fat to cure nits.\textsuperscript{112} Finally, Pliny describes how the use of a dog's spleen may cure the spleen of a sick patient: “Pliny recommended ripping open a lamb or dog, taking its spleen and placing it on the sick spleen of the patient. The next day the spleen was taken and glued to the bedroom wall and sealed with 27 seals.”\textsuperscript{113} These three beliefs denote the earliest remedies derived from canine substances and establish the earliest point in time, middle of the first century A.D., in which the dog adopted the role of healer in Folk Medicine.\textsuperscript{114}

**Canines as Healing Agents**

Lore pertaining to the dog's liminal role in health is just as extensive as their role in death. Folk Collection 8a contains over fifteen entries in Groups 2 and 7 and Folk Collection 36 includes over fifty entries. Table 3-1 provides a selection of folk remedies from Folk Collections 8a and 36, and highlights the role of the dog in the transitional rite of healing throughout numerous cultures and historic time periods. The folklore argues

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid, 18.
\textsuperscript{111} USU Wayland D. Hand Collection of Superstition and Popular Belief. (FOLK COLL. 36: Cabinet 3: 3-2: 1-2: Dog: Health), Special Collections and Archives Department, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
\textsuperscript{112} Nits are the egg or young form of parasitic insects such as head louse. Ibid.
\textsuperscript{113} This belief was also documented by Marcellus of Bordeaux of Gaul at the end of the 4\textsuperscript{th} century: “Fresh dog's spleen/placed on patient’s spleen area while healer says that he used dog’s spleen as curative remedy/dog's spleen is then placed into wall cabinet of bed room and sealed 3x9 times.” Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} It is possible that the dog adopted this role earlier than this time period; however, earlier texts do not document the use of the dog and Folk Collection 36 does not contain any earlier lore than Pliny's.
for the evolving role of the dog from secondary participant (use of an animal or animal derived product to create remedies for various ailments) to a near incorporation into an active agent (use of a living animal that is actively engaged) in the healing process.

The first documented use of animal excrement, as a remedy, dates to approximately 2600 B.C. in Mesopotamia and thus suggests that any belief pertaining to this topic originated from this ancient civilization.\(^\text{115}\) The Wayland D. Hand collection contains four beliefs, dating to the Twentieth century, which also highlights the use or consumption of dog manure to cure various ailments. The earliest belief from this collection stems from Berlin, dates to approximately 1900, and states to cure a sore throat “stew up a stone in dog’s excrement, drink it down, and soon you will get well.”\(^\text{116}\) Almost 42 years later this belief appears in Scotland as a cure for squincy: “according to Monorief dog’s dung or powdered dog’s dung was blown into the mouth by a reed or pipe for the cure of ‘squincy’ [sic].”\(^\text{117}\)

\(^{115}\) Alves, et. al, “From Past to Present,” 15-16.
\(^{116}\) USU Wayland D. Hand Collection of Superstition and Popular Belief. (FOLK COLL. 36: Cabinet 3: 3-2: 1-2: Dog: Health), Special Collections, Merrill-Cazier, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
\(^{117}\) Squincy, or quinsy, is a common name for the formation of a peritonsillar abscess in the throat. It is believed to be a more severe form of tonsillitis and could be deadly if left untreated. USU Wayland D. Hand Collection of Superstition and Popular Belief. (FOLK COLL. 36: Cabinet 3: 3-2: 1-2: Dog: Health), Special Collections, Merrill-Cazier, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
| Table 3-1: Examples of folk remedies throughout the United States and World |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| **Cure for ailments**                        | Ireland (1908)  |
| To cure a patient's whooping cough, place a strand of patient's hair in bread and butter and allow dog to eat. |                  |
| **Cure for blindness**                       | Brazil (1959)   |
| Ask dog                                       |                  |
| **Cure for eye sores**                       | Turkey (N.D.)   |
| Mix bile of young dog and rub into eyes       |                  |
| **Cure for jaundice**                        | Czechoslovakia (1946) |
| Collect blood upon bread from incisions made on forehead, temples, and nose in crosswire cute. Feed bread to dog. |                  |
| **Cure for ringworm**                        | Puckett, Ohio, USA |
| Circle the sore three times with a single whisk of a broom and throw over shoulder. This will transfer the disease to a dog or cat. |                  |
| **Cure for snake bite**                      | Georgetown, Texas, USA (1970) |
| If a dog which has been bitten by a rattlesnake and recovered, licks the wound of a person bitten by a snake that person will recover. |                  |
| **Growths**                                  | Fairview, WY, & Georgetown, TX, USA (1935 & '70) |
| If one sticks their tongue in the hole of a recently lost tooth, a dog's tooth will grow in its place. |                  |
| **To heal wounds faster**                    | Grand Rapids, MI, USA (1984) |
| Let dog lick wound.                          |                  |
| **To prevent allergies**                     | Blanding, UT, USA (1979) |
| Keep a Chihuahua in the house to prevent asthma attacks. |                  |
| **To prevent rabies after dog bite**         | Parawon, UT, USA (N.D.) |
| Apply caustic potash and drink whiskey to cause sleep. |                  |
| Kill the dog. If the dog gets rabies later on in life, the person bit will also get rabies. |                  |
| **To prevent tuberculosis**                  | Czechoslovakia (1946) |
| Bath child in bath, at the same time as a dog or cat, in water fetched from nine wells. |                  |
| **To prevent warts**                         | Berlin (1900) |
| Do not spit on dog.                          |                  |
| **To rid oneself of warts**                  | Berlin (1900) & Blanding, UT, USA (1979) |
| Circle a piece of bread around the wart and allow dog to eat. |                  |
| **To reduce body pain**                      | Czechoslovakia (1946) |
| Use dog’s lard internally against pains in body sides. |                  |

1) USU Student Folklore Genre Collection: Belief, 1960-2011. (FOLK COLL. 8a: Group 2, Boxes 1 and 6), Special Collections and Archives Department, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
2) USU Wayland D. Hand Collection of Superstition and Popular Belief. (FOLK COLL. 36: Cabinet 3: 3-2: 1-2: Dog: Health), Special Collections and Archives Department, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
The final two beliefs, from Folk Collection 36, appear approximately six years later in Czechoslovakia and the use of dog excrement to cure angina and cold-fever. The first belief incorporates the use of other animal substances in addition to dog excrement: "Bandages of neck during angina are made of urine, cow’s [sic] and human excrements, pigeon’s excrements with vinegar, swallow’s nest, and white dung of dog."\(^{118}\) The second belief, originating from Czechoslovakia, describes a mixture of whiskey with dog dung mixed in as a remedy to cure cold-fever.\(^{119}\) These four beliefs emphasize the consumption of excrement to cure various ailments and highlights the spread of the dog’s role in Folk Medicine from one country to the next and from one historic period to another.

The folklore shows a clear shift from the consumption of canine substances to cure a disease to the consumption of these products as a preventative from contracting a disease. Folk Collection 8a contains a belief which describes the consumption of dog hair to prevent rabies: "If a dog bites you, you take some of the dog’s hair, burn it, put water on the ashes and drink it. This will keep you from getting rabies."\(^{120}\) This belief first appears in Rock Springs, Wyoming in 1920 and again in 1970. It is possible that this shift highlights the species’ adoption of a new role in Folk Medicine.

The act of transferring physical traits, or disease, from one liminal being to another is common in the lore. One belief, originating from Seoul, Korea dating from 1988, emphasizes the consumption of animals to gain its physical strength and states: "It is believed that consumption of dog meat is a source of physical strength and cuts down

\(^{118}\) USU Wayland D. Hand Collection of Superstition and Popular Belief. (FOLK COLL. 36: Cabinet 3: 3-2: 1-2: Dog: Health), Special Collections and Archives Department, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.


\(^{120}\) USU Student Folklore Genre Collection: Belief, 1960-2011. (FOLK COLL. 8a: Group 2, Box 1, Folder 19), Special Collections and Archives Department, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
on perspiration during summer months."¹²¹ This belief focuses on the transference of an animal's physical strength or characteristics to a human. However, the act of transference can also happen in reverse in which the human transmits a disease to an animal through the animal's consumption of food. One such belief originates in Czechoslovakia: "It is believed that an illness will be transferred to dogs (if) 'meat given to dogs was rubbed over an ailing part of human body or (if) human urine soaked through (the meat)."¹²² The use of bread, in place of meat, is a common theme as represented in this Irish belief: "If a person has whooping-cough, get him to cough on a piece of bread, and give the bread to a dog to eat. The cough will pass to the dog, and the man will get well at once."¹²³ The three most commonly stated diseases, which the act of transference is intended to cure, are ringworms, warts, and whooping-cough. Although the dog remains an unwitting secondary participant, the difference between the act of transference based on consumption of the dog, or its derived product, in order to obtain physical attributes and the reverse transference, as discussed above, is that the dog is alive. The concept of using a living dog highlights a progression in Folk Medicine as well as the first step towards the dog becoming a living active agent in the transitional rite of healing.

There are only two folk beliefs, out of over sixty in Folk Collections 8a and 36, which pertain to the role of the dog as an active agent of the healing process. Each belief derives from within the United States – Blanding, Utah and Grand Rapids, Michigan – and stems from two different cultures. The lore highlights the act of a dog licking a

¹²¹ USU Student Folklore Genre Collection: Belief, 1960-2011. (FOLK COLL. 8a: Group 2, Box 20, Folder 19), Special Collections and Archives Department, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
¹²² USU Wayland D. Hand Collection of Superstition and Popular Belief. (FOLK COLL. 36: Cabinet 3: 3-2: 1-2: Dog: Health), Special Collections and Archives Department, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
wound: "The Indians used to get rid of their warts by cutting them off with a knife and then letting a dog lick the wound. If a dog doesn’t lick the wound, the wart will grow back."

The dog serves as an active agent by initiating the healing process. Furthermore, the dog licking the wound serves as a preventative measure to keep the growth from returning. The second belief, stemming from Michigan, states: "wounds will heal faster if they are licked by a dog." These beliefs denote that some notion of fact rests within the "old wives tales" believed to be irrelevant in the study of Folk Medicine. Finally, each belief indicates that the dog was already transitioning into its role as an active, rather than a secondary, participant within the field of Folk Medicine and prior to the development of contemporary fields which utilize the dog as an active agent.

There are two fields of study, Anthrozoology and Zootherapy, which expand upon themes from Folk Medicine and may be applied to modern medicine. Anthrozoology is a developing field of study in which scholars research the effects of human-animal interactions (HAI) on human health and development spanning the different stages in life. Zootherapy refers to 1) the medicinal use of therapeutic drugs developed from animal derived products to treat illnesses and health conditions, and 2) a type of psychological therapy which uses animals. Both Anthrozoology and Zootherapy highlight the use of dogs as secondary participants and active agents which initiate and participate in the transitional rite of healing.

124 USU Student Folklore Genre Collection: Belief, 1960-2011. (FOLK COLL. 8a: Group 2, Box 6, Folder 12), Special Collections and Archives Department, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
125 Ibid, (FOLK COLL. 8a: Group 2, Box 6, Folder 12).
Anthrozoologists have published studies on the health benefits of dog ownership. Pet ownership is linked to increased physical activity in both children and adults. Children between the ages of five and six, and between the ages of ten and twelve, are reported to walk a dog at least once per week. Adult dog owners tended to walk twice as much as non-dog owners and the amount of time spent walking was longer for dog owners than non-dog owners. This study confirms that dog owners and their families are less likely to be overweight or obese than non-dog owners and their families due to increased amounts of physical activity. A study on dementia patients shows that, when in the presence of a dog, the patient’s heart rate and diastolic blood pressure decreases while socialization variables, such as smiling, tactile contact, and physical warmth, increases.

The field of Zootherapy expands on one of the core themes of Folk Medicine and embraces animals as both secondary participants and as active agents in the healing process. Both early Folk Medicine and contemporary medicinal Zootherapy encourages the consumption of animals, and the use of animal derived products in therapeutic drugs, as a means to cure disease. In this sense the animal is a secondary participant rather than a living active agent.

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129 For additional information on this study see: Chandler, Animal Assisted Therapy in Counseling, 17 – 18.

130 Trade in aardvark claws, hornbill heads, pythons, and vulture heads, to cure various ailments, is popular throughout West and Southern Africa. Boa heads, bottled raccoon fat, dried seahorse, and rattlesnakes are traded throughout Brazilian cities, while deer antlers and penises, ground beetles, and starfish are used in China. Romula Romeu Nobrega Alves, Ierece Lucena Rosa, Ulysses Paulino Albuquerque and Anthony B. Cunningham, “Medicine from the Wild: An Overview of the Use and Trade of Animal Products in Traditional Medicines,” in Animals in Traditional Folk Medicine: Implications for Conservation, eds. Romulo Alves and Ierece Lucena Rosa (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2013), 28-30.
Where Zootherapy differs from early Folk Medicine, and what may be thought of as the contemporary form of Folk Medicine, is the use of animals in therapy. The first documented case of animal-assisted therapy appears in 1792 at the York Retreat in England. William Tuke observed that animals, such as chickens, rabbits, and other farm animals, would improve the health of the emotionally ill. Florence Nightingale was the first clinician to study animals in health care and observed that small companion animals were beneficial to chronically ill patients in the late 1800’s. Since then, several domesticated animals, including cats, chickens, horses, and dogs, have adopted the role of therapy animals and visit businesses, hospitals, mental health units, nursing homes, prisons, and schools.

The dog’s liminal role as an active agent, which both initiates and participates in the transitional rite of healing, is perhaps most prevalent in contemporary psychological therapy. Both therapists and caregivers have noted that the presence of the dog helps to initiate difficult conversations with their patients:

Most of the people who seek help from caregivers are experiencing or have experienced some difficulty in life, and often this has resulted in some personal suffering or even trauma. Reflecting on this history can be painful, and focusing on the future is sometimes rather scary because of the anticipation of more difficulties, or fear of failure, or even more trauma. The presence of an animal is almost immediately and inevitably orients one’s attention to the present. Most people’s senses become attuned to the comfort and furry reassurance that is potentially available.

The natural tendency for humans and dogs to form relationships with one another, as highlighted by Anthrozoology, allows the patient to establish rapport and empathy with

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131 Pichot and Coulter, Animal-Assisted Brief Therapy, 9.
132 Ibid, 9.
133 Ibid, xii.
the dog quicker than with the human therapist. Thus the dog has the client’s trust well before the therapist. These two factors enable the dog to initiate the psychological healing process far earlier than their human counterpart.

The dog’s status as a permanent liminal being allows the species to actively participate in the healing process. As Anthrozoology has confirmed, people are attracted to the sight of an animal, such as the dog, from an early age. This knowledge has proven beneficial when applied to Zootherapy. When a dog acts as a focal point for children with attention-deficit disorder, the child’s ability to concentrate increases; similar studies in Alzheimer’s patients further demonstrates the dog’s ability to bring sufferers into the present. This continuous return to the present has proven to be beneficial to patients. Liminality attracts liminality within the transitional phase. When a patient is in the transitional phase they become more connected to the dog than to others. Thus the dog, as an active participant in the healing process, enables the patient to connect to the present.

Case Study One: Children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

In 2009, researchers conducted a study to measure the effect of therapy dogs on children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The study included 22 students attending a special school intended to ease the transition of students back to a classroom in a regular school. Doctors diagnosed all 22 of the children with ADHD and one with oppositional defiant disorder (ODD). Additionally, doctors also diagnosed

134 Chandler, Animal Assisted Therapy in Counseling, 5.
135 For further information on studies pertaining to the dog’s role in aiding patients with attention-deficit disorder and Alzheimer’s see: Davis, Therapy Dogs, 2.
136 For additional information on Zootherapy and the benefits of animal-assisted therapy see: Becker and Morton, The Healing Power of Pets; Fine, Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy; Homans, What’s a Dog For?; Stanley-Hermanns and Miller, “Animal-Assisted Therapy.”
several of the children, with pre-existing diagnoses of ADHD, with ODD and one with mental retardation. The majority of the students lived with a dog in their household.137

The researchers tested each child for 15 minutes over a span of two days. They placed a dog (a four-year-old, 13 pound, female Shit-Tzu) in the child’s lap for the first five minutes and then the small breed away. The test measured the child’s diastolic blood pressure (DBP), systolic blood pressure (SBP), and heart rate (HR) at the end of each five-minute period. Researchers discovered that the child’s DBP increased during the first five-minutes when the child was holding the dog. Their SBP also increased during the interval following the dog’s departure. Finally, the child’s HR decreased during both intervals. The researchers believed that the temporary increased blood pressure and decreased heart rates was in response to a positive stimulus – the presence of a therapy dog.138

Case Study Two: Measuring Sociability and Other Benefits for the Elderly

In 1993, researchers conducted a study on nursing home residents to test the social interactions of each resident following the introduction of a pet-facilitated therapy program. The study last for ten weeks with a final follow-up. The nurses administered the tests on four separate dates: 1) Pretest – first day of the study, 2) Midpoint – the fifth week, 3) Post-test – the tenth week and, 4) Follow-up – one month after the conclusion of the test. Participants averaged an age just over 75 years and included 18 males and 35 females. Volunteers brought the visiting pets (four cats, two small dogs, and one rabbit) in each week for two hours per visit. The researchers encouraged the residents to discuss with volunteers their former pets and to handle or pet one of the visiting animals.

Researchers converted the results of each test into a numerical scale and is displayed in Table 3-2.\footnote{Ibid, 103.}

Table 3-2: Average sociability of residents on numerical scale of the testing procedure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Test</td>
<td>39.14</td>
<td>32.90</td>
<td>41.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midpoint</td>
<td>48.77</td>
<td>52.90</td>
<td>47.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Test</td>
<td>53.57</td>
<td>52.90</td>
<td>53.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up</td>
<td>47.37</td>
<td>43.10</td>
<td>49.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The researchers concluded that the mean score increased during the ten-weeks that the animals visited the home, peaked at the Post-Test mark, and began to decline following the removal of the animals. The results suggest that the mean score, or average sociability, would continue to increase if visiting persisted after the ten week mark. The study also highlighted a significant increase by 20 points in male sociability between the Pre-Test and Midpoint. Additionally, males showed a higher average at the five week testing than the female average. However, male sociability did not improve after the Midpoint test, while female sociability continued to increase until the Post-Test. Both genders decreased at the Follow-Up test, males more drastically then female, and coincides with the removal of the visiting animals after the ten week mark.\footnote{Ibid, 103-104.}

In addition to an increase in sociability during the test, the researchers also noted an increase in self-reliance and mobility stating that “eleven residents had to be dressed by others prior to the start of the study; only three had to be dressed by others at the time
of the post-test.\footnote{141}{Ibid, 104.} The researchers also noted that this number increased to seven at the time of the Follow-Up. Again, these results suggest that the number of participants that required assistance from others would have continued to decline if the program persisted longer than ten weeks.
CONCLUSION

They have ushered us through the various decades, allowing us to laugh at our own foibles without judgment. From the Depression era through world wars, the baby boom, and suburban sprawl, and into the current era of technology, dogs have been pictured as loyal companions and best friends.142

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The dog is a culturally liminal being straddling the realms between divine and earthly, nature and culture, living and death, working and companion, places the species in this state. “Liminality attracts liminality,” and the species permanently liminal state enabled the dog to adopt its newest role as a therapy dog in contemporary psychological therapy.143 An individual becomes temporary liminal, transitioning from one state of mind to another, when in a therapy session. The permanent liminality of the dog attracts and continues to engage this state of temporary liminality in the individual; thus the species becomes an active participant in the healing process by both initiating and participating throughout the individual’s transitional rite.

Folk medicine highlights the use of the dog and its derived product to create remedies. In this sense the dog is a secondary participant in the healing process. The fields of Anthrozoology and Zootherapy emphasize the role of the dog as a therapy animal and an active agent in the process. However, the cultural progression from secondary participant to active agent remains unclear. Folklore, which highlights the dog engaging in the healing process, can fill in this missing puzzle piece. The earliest reference to the dog playing an active role in the healing process originated from Berlin in 1900. This lore refers to letting a dog lick a wound so that it may heal faster. Similar

lore reappears in Blanding, Utah, USA in 1979 and in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1984. Thus it is possible that this transition from secondary participant to active agent began to occur as early as the 1900s.

Anne Alden, author of “Personification of Pets: The Evolution of Canine Cartoons in the New Yorker,” discusses the concept of anthropomorphizing the dog and how this is portrayed in cartoons from the New Yorker. She highlights a growing popularity in dog cartoons; from the 1920s to the 1960s only two percent of cartoons portrayed the dog as opposed to five percent in the 1990s and four percent from 2000 to 2002, in conjunction with a growing trend toward anthropomorphism of the dog. She states that in the 1920s only four percent of the cartoons were anthropomorphic in nature. The percentage grew to 67 percent in the 1990s and this trend continued until the completion of her study in 2002. Alden also draws a correlation between the anthropomorphic portrayal of dog in the New Yorker and the anthropomorphizing of companion animals within the last decade. In her conclusion, Alden questions what led to this popularity and states: “Perhaps anthropomorphic dog cartoons make what would be harsh messages about human weakness easier to accept... we regard dogs with a general good will that softens the critical social commentary delivered by cartoons.”

If the dog serves as the mediator for harsh messages, what happens if the dog becomes more human than animal or reverts back to its wild roots? What happens if the dog losses its liminality?

The dog is a culturally permanent liminal being and has played a prevalent role in human society. The species has adopted a dualistic being, straddling the world between the animal kingdom and the human realm. This dualism enables the dog to adapt to and

144 Alden, “Personification of Pets,” 232.
meet the needs of our civilization. The dog serves as our connection to the wild in an ever
growing industrialized society. They ease our fear of death by serving as harbingers,
guides, and guardians. The species performs numerous tasks as a working animal and has
also become members of the family. Finally, the dog’s liminality is prevalent in its
newest role as a therapy animal, which is able to both initiate and participate in the
transitional rite of healing.
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